

Message Text

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TO USDEL ALEXANDRIA IMMEDIATE

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TAGS: OVIP (KISSINGER)

SUBJECT: PRESS MATERIAL

1. HERewith FULL TEXT C. L. SULZBERGER OP-ED COLUMN
WEDNESDAY, MAY 1, 1974, NEW YORK TIMES HEADED "MIRACLES
OR MISSILES?"

2. DAMASCUS, SYRIA -- MANY MIRACLES HAVE BEEN REPORTED
IN THIS PART OF THE WORLD BUT I SOMEHOW DOUBT IF HENRY
KISSINGER, DESCRIBED AS A MIRACLE-WORKER BY HIS NEW
FRIEND, ANWAR EL-SADAT, PRESIDENT OF EGYPT, IS GOING TO
PULL ONE OUT OF HIS HAT WHEN HE COMES HERE ON HIS NEW
TOUR OF THE BIBLE LANDS TO BEGIN WITH, HE DOESN'T
WEAR A HAT.

3. THE KEY FIGURE ON THIS TRIP IS HAFIZ AL-ASSAD, SYRIA'S
44-YEAR OLD CHIEF OF STATE. IF MR. ASSAD, A BLOCKY SELF-
CONTAINED, COURTEOUS GENERAL, WHO MAY BE THE WORLD'S ONLY
POLITICAL BOSS WHO CAN FLY A MIG, TALKS TO THE SECRETARY
OF STATE THE WAY HE TALKED TO ME, MR. KISSINGER MAY ORDER
A HOMBURG AFTER ALL.

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4. THE SYRIAN USED TO COMMAND THE AIR FORCE BEFORE HE SEIZED CONTROL OF HIS COUNTRY FOUR YEARS AGO. BUT THIS TECHNICAL EXPERIENCE HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH THE FACT THAT

OUR LENGTHY, UNEMOTIONAL CONVERSATION IN THE PALACE OF THIS FAMOUS ANCIENT CITY, WHERE THE HEAD OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST IS ENSHRINED WAS STUDDERED WITH LOUD BANGS.

5. THE BANGS DIDN'T COME FROM MR. ASSAD WHO IS BY NATURE SO COOL HE DOESN'T HAVE TO KEEP IT. NO, THE COUNTERPOINT WAS PROVIDED BY SYRIAN AND ISRAELI JETS, WHICH STARTED THEIR ARGUMENTS NEAR MOUNT HERMON AND GOT SO LOUD ABOUT THEIR MISSILE EXCHANGE AS THEY SKIDDED OVERHEAD THAT THE FORMER AIR FORCE GENERAL TELEPHONED TO INQUIRE WHAT THE NOISE WAS ALL ABOUT.

6. THE NOISE, OF COURSE, SYMBOLIZED WHAT BRINGS HENRY HERE. HAD HIS WIFE BEEN ARRANGING THE TOUR, JOHN THE BAPTIST MIGHT HAVE BEEN THE ATTRACTION; BUT SHE IS OFF INVESTIGATING THE NILE VALLEY.

7. PRESIDENT ASSAD REPRESENTS THE HURDLE TO BE CROSSED BEFORE AN ARAB-ISRAELI PEACE CONFERENCE CAN BE RECONVENED. HE IS A HIGHLY MORAL, ESSENTIALLY UNSUBTLE MAN OF MODEST ORIGINS. HE COMES FROM AN ALAWITE FAMILY IN THE NORTH. THE ALAWITES ARE A SCHISMATIC MOSLEM SECT IN THE INTENSELY RELIGIOUS MIDDLE EAST WHERE MORE MEN BY FAR HAVE BEEN KILLED FOR GOD THAN FOR ANY OTHER REASON.

8. HE GRADUATED FROM MILITARY ACADEMY AND TRAINED AS A FIGHTER PILOT IN RUSSIA, ALTHOUGH HE DOESN'T LOOK LIKE A DASHING AEROBATICS EXPERT AND TOLD ME THAT ON HIS RARE FREE MOMENTS HE LIKES (LINE OMITTED).

9. MR. ASSAD ACKNOWLEDGES NO SPECIFIC IDEOLOGICAL OR PERSONAL INFLUENCES. HE SAYS HE WAS BITTEN EARLY BY A PATRIOTIC BUG AND A DESIRE TO SHAKE OFF FOREIGN INFLUENCES (FRENCH, WHEN HE WAS BORN).

10. ACCORDING TO HIM HE WAS ALWAYS SERIOUS AND SPENT UNCLASSIFIED

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MUCH TIME READING, AS HE STILL DOES. HE JOINED THE BAATH ARAB SOCIALIST PARTY--OFTEN DIVIDED INTO FACTIONS--AND STILL CONSIDERS HIMSELF A BAATH "ARAB SOCIALIST NATIONALIST" BUT EMPHATICALLY NOT "A MARXIST." HE CLAIMS HIS AMBITION HAS BEEN CONSTANT: TO LIBERATE AND DEVELOP HIS COUNTRY AND TO EQUALIZE THE DISTRIBUTION OF ITS WEALTH.

11. DIPLOMATS SAY HE HAS SHOWN A TENDENCY TOWARD LIBERALIZATION, ECONOMIC RELAXATION AND RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE. CHRISTIAN SERVICES ARE BROADCAST BY THE STATE

RADIO ON SUNDAYS FOR THE FIRST TIME IN YEARS. IN SYRIAN TERMS, ALL THESE ASPECTS ARE SIGNIFICANT. THIS IS A DURABLE LITTLE COUNTRY, INURED TO HARDSHIP, WHICH BOASTS IT MAKES THE TOUGHEST SOLDIERS IN THE ARAB WORLD.

12. MR. ASSAD CLAIMS THAT "WARS ARE NOT OUR HOBBY." HIS INITIAL TRADE WAS WAR AND HE IS NOT LIKELY TO BE EASILY DIVERTED FROM HIS BASIC GOALS IN THE NEW DEMI-WAR WITH ISRAEL, A DEMI-WAR ONLY IN THE SENSE THAT SYRIA ALONE IS DOING THE FIGHTING. HE ACKNOWLEDGES THAT HIS MILITARY SUPPLIES HAVE BEEN BUILT UP BY RUSSIA SO THEY ARE AT LEAST AS STRONG AS WHEN THE OCTOBER ARAB-ISRAELI WAR STARTED. HE DEPENDS ON MOSCOW TO CONTINUE TO PASS THE AMMUNITION EVEN IF IT DOESN'T JOIN HIS ALAWITES IN PRAISING THE LORD.

13. IT SEEMS OBVIOUS THAT IF MR. KISSINGER, IS TO PRODUCE A MIRACLE AND END THE BOOMING ON THE MOUNT HERMON-GOLAN FRONT, THUS OPENING THE DOOR TO A NEW PEACE MEETING IN GENEVA, HE IS GOING TO HAVE TO PUT NEW PRESSURE ON ISRAEL WHILE HIS COLLEAGUE, SOVIET FOREIGN MINISTER ANDREI GROMYKO, SOMEHOW TRANQUILIZES SYRIA.

14. ISRAEL IS UNHAPPY ABOUT WHAT HAS BEEN GOING ON, NOT ONLY IN INTERESTED SUPERPOWER CAPITALS BUT ALSO WITH THE SITUATION ALONG ITS BORDERS AND INSIDE THEM. IT COUNTS ON MR. KISSINGER AND HOPES HE CAN ASSUAGE THE STOLID MR. GROMYKO.

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15. BUT WHETHER ALL THIS CAN INFLUENCE THE GRANITIC MR. ASSAD AND SILENCE THE MISSILES--THAT WILL INDEED GIVE A MIRACULOUS TINGE TO WHAT IS CALLED DIPLOMACY.
(END TEXT) RUSH

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